

Proposal for a Minor Degree Plan:

Global Interreligious Dynamics

Rationale

The Department of Religious Studies wishes to propose a new minor degree plan entitled *Global Interreligious Dynamics*. This minor focuses on dynamics that are observable in situations of perceived religious difference. It is designed to help students develop a special competency that they may be able to utilize in their professional careers. The degree plan will appear as *Global Interreligious Dynamics* on the students' transcripts and thus highlight this competency. As a supplementary minor it will appeal to students in a variety of programs, including Human Dimensions of Organizations, International Relations/Global Studies, and Social Work. The colleagues who run these programs have confirmed that the minor would supplement their programs well (see appendix below). This degree plan will not replace but complement the existing minor in Religious Studies, which is flexible in its electives, thus allowing students to choose from many different religions, regions, and topics those that match their respective interests. In contrast, the proposed minor is specifically tailored to facilitate the study of interreligious encounters.

Description

The minor's core question is: What happens when religious actors and institutions are confronted with what they perceive as an "other" (e.g., beliefs and practices of adherents of a different religion or a different denomination/sect, of atheists, of non-religious people, a secular state, and the like)? The generic phrase "religious conflict" only captures one part of the broad spectrum and of the multidimensionality of observed processes, which range from violent insistence on one to uncritical acceptance of all, with varieties of missionizing, assimilation, syncretism, dialogue, and much more in between. Such processes regularly include negotiations over alterity and identity and over boundaries. More often than not, ostensibly religious disputes are closely tied to political, economic, social, and other issues, and they are always the result of a certain historical development within a particular context.

A number of scholars at UT study such questions, both in their research and their courses. The proposed minor degree plan will bundle courses that address this topic and thus provide students with a variety of case studies and analyses of interreligious encounters. In addition, a new course that is currently being developed, entitled *Introduction to Interreligious Dynamics*, will provide a survey and a theoretical framework for the minor. This course will also include elements of experiential learning that will give students the opportunity to observe how problems resulting from interreligious encounters are addressed in various administrative and social settings (e.g., the City of Austin, AISD, the state legislature, multinational firms and corporations, Interfaith Action of Central Texas). Aside from this course, other requirements include the capstone course in Religious Studies, in which the students pick as their final project a topic that is related to interreligious dynamics, and three electives from a list of approved courses (see below). These carefully selected courses are offered by faculty from various disciplines and programs (Religious Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Asian Studies, History, Slavic and Eurasian Studies, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, Communication Studies).

Having studied a substantial number of cases of interreligious encounters and the respective theoretical frameworks, students will be able to analyze current situations and problems and make suggestions for improvement. We do not suggest that the minor provides training towards a profession, but in combination with other majors and/or for particular career paths this competency might prove useful. The minor is not intended to train leaders in interreligious dialogue, a training that programs in religiously affiliated schools and seminaries provide. In fact, it will include critical analyses of the interfaith movement in the U.S. and its ideological underpinnings. Our analytical and empirical approach is strictly non-religious and non-confessional.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students learn to analyze situations of interreligious encounter by reflecting upon and critically applying scholarly categories such as conversion, syncretism, reinterpretation and appropriation, hybridity, assimilation, acculturation, diaspora, mission, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, dialogue, tolerance, and more.
2. Students study a substantial number of such situations, which include multiple forms of negotiations and conflicts, around the globe, both past and present.
3. Students learn to recognize that every interreligious encounter must be contextualized and historicized. Religious aspects are regularly linked with political, economic, social, and other factors, and every situation is the result of historical processes and will impact subsequent developments.
4. Students learn to reflect critically upon the categories “religion” and “interreligious” and understand that in particular situations boundaries may be drawn not between major religious traditions, but between different sects or denominations of one tradition, between conservatives and progressives within one community, between religious and non-religious people, between religious and secular spheres, etc. They also learn that the identity formation that accompanies boundary-making must not be reduced to religious identity but normally includes multiple other aspects as well (political, economic, ethnic, gender, etc.).
5. Having studied a variety of past and present cases and the theoretical underpinnings and implications of the respective analytical terms, students will be able to apply that competency to current contexts and to offer suggestions for improvement in situations of religious encounter or conflict.

Requirements

- ~~R S 310 Introduction to the Study of Religion~~
- R S 307 Introduction to Interreligious Dynamics (new course)
- R S 375S Religious Studies Capstone Seminar
- Nine additional hours from approved list below, including six hours upper-division.

Provisional list of approved courses

Lower-division:

1. R S 310 • Introduction to the Study of Religion (Landau, Moin)
2. ANS 301R • History of Religions of Asia (Brereton, Freiburger)
3. R S 304 • Judaism, Christianity, And Islam (Smith, Moin)

4. R S 306 • Comparative Religious Ethics (Schofer)
5. ANS 301M • Introduction to Buddhism (Freiberger)
6. J S 311 • Intro To Jewish Latin America (Weinreb)
7. J S 301 • Jewish Studies: In Introduction (Weinreb)
8. R S 313M • Jewish Civilization: Beginnings To 1492 (Schofer)
9. HIS 306N • Jewish Civilization: 1492 To Present (Bodian)
10. HIS 306K • Introduction to the Middle East: Rel/Cul/Hist Fnd (Spellberg)
11. R S 316U • History Of Religion In The United States (Graber)
12. R S 318 • The Rise Of Christianity (White)
13. ANS 340 • Shi'i Islam (Hyder)
14. ANS 340 • Sufism & Islamic Mysticism (Hyder)

Upper-division:

1. ANS 340 • History of Hindu Religious Traditions (Brereton, Davis)
2. HIS 375D • Islamic Spain and North Africa to 1492 (Spellberg)
3. HIS 350R-22 • History Of Islam In The United States (Spellberg)
4. R S 346 • Religion and Social Justice in the U.S. (Seales)
5. R S 346 • Evangelical Christianity (Seales)
6. R S 346 • African American Religions (Seales)
7. R S 346D • Native American Religion (Graber)
8. REE 345 • Shamanism and the Idea of the 'Primitive' (Roberts)
9. J S 363 • Abraham & Abrahamic Religion (Kaplan)
10. HIS 362G • The Church And The Jews (Bodian)
11. REE 325 • Russian Orthodox Religion & Culture (Roberts)
12. ISL 340.6 • Religions of the Middle East (Azam)
13. R S 358 • Islam in the Early Modern World (Moin)
14. J S 364 • Origins Of Monotheism (Wells)
15. J S 365 • Multicultural Israel (Weinreb)
16. R S 366 • Religions Of The Caribbean (Crosson)
17. ANS 340 • Religions In Contact (Freiberger)
18. R S 373 • Religious Ethics/Human Rights (Schofer)
19. R S 373L • Science/Magic/Religion (Crosson)
20. R S 375S • Religions Of No Religion (Crosson)
21. R S 375S • The Crusades (Newman)
22. CMS 354 • Conflict Resolution (Maxwell)

Appendix: Comments about the proposal

Amy Ware, Director, Human Dimensions of Organizations:

“Thanks so much for sending this along! It looks fascinating. I would imagine some HDO majors would be interested in this and am happy to promote it once it is up and running. In addition to the reason you suggested – that the minor will allow them to offer suggestions for improvement – I think it could appeal to people planning to work in a global environment. (And, nowadays, who doesn't?) That would be my primary suggestion: To include global business concerns in your justifications. We have many MA students (mid-career) who work in

transnational environments. One, for example, oversees a virtual team living on 4 continents. We have a recruiter for BP who travels abroad recruiting; part of that search is concerned with cultural fit. These religious dynamics come into play with international mergers/acquisitions; global corporations; business networking; recruiting; and cross-cultural/religious negotiations (to name a few). – It has real practical use, as I see it. Good luck with it!”

Art Markman, Founding Director, Human Dimensions of Organizations:

“Yes, this new minor looks great, and I can certainly imagine that some of our majors would find this appealing.”

Cossy Hough, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Programs, School of Social Work:

“I think that there may be some interest among our students in the minor. We have students who are definitely interested in the topic and interested in exploring interreligious dynamics from a social justice perspective.”

Michael Anderson, Director, International Religions/Global Studies:

“Many thanks for passing along this proposal, which I am pleased to hear about. I have contacted our advising team and they agree that a number of our students could very well be interested in taking on this minor. ... I agree that this would be a very welcome supplement for many of our students focusing on the culture track. Once the minor gets finalized, please feel free to follow up with me, and I’d be happy to have you pay a class visit to Intro to IRG and introduce it to our students.”

Denise Spellberg, Department of History:

“I think the proposed minor important and timely. I would very much like to be part of it.”

Hina Azam, Department of Middle Eastern Studies:

“This looks great! I think it’s a minor that could pair very well with a variety of professional degrees as well, for students who want some religious studies training but do not want to take a whole major in religious studies.”

Bruce Wells, Department of Middle Eastern Studies:

“Thank you for including me in this exciting proposal. ... Best of luck with the new proposal.”

Jonathan Kaplan, Department of Middle Eastern Studies:

“I would be happy to have my course included for this innovative new minor.”

Madeline Maxwell, Communication Studies; Director, UT Project on Conflict Resolution

“That sounds like a wonderful minor; I probably would have taken it in college! I’d be delighted to have students with those interests in my class; in my conflict classes, I always include religion along with cultural differences.”